

{As Prepared for Delivery}

**Interfaith Housing Alliance
Self Help Housing Check Presentation
Shippensburg, Pennsylvania
June 9, 2006**

**Thomas C. Dorr
Under Secretary for Rural Development
Remarks**

Good morning. It is both a privilege and a pleasure to be here today.

Thank you, Jim, for your kind remarks. And thank you, Gary, for your good work -- and the work of the Pennsylvania Rural Development staff -- in getting us to this point.

As the guy from Washington, I get invited pretty regularly to show up at events like this to present a check or cut a ribbon or turn over the first shovel full of dirt. That's one of the best parts of the job.

But whether it's a Self-Help Housing start in Pennsylvania ... an ethanol plant in Minnesota ... a child care center in Texas or a rural hospital in Montana ... I never lose sight of the fact that most of the work is done locally. We are here to support YOU.

USDA Rural Development – like other federal and state agencies – can help with financing and technical support, and that’s important.

But ultimately, the vision, energy, commitment, and sacrifice comes mostly from you. Everything we do depends on strong partners in rural communities – local businesses, non-profit organizations, State and local governments, entrepreneurs, farmers, and individual homeowners.

We are very proud today to be partnering with the Interfaith Housing Alliance. Thank you again for making this happen.

This is a great event. Homeownership is part of the American dream. It strengthens families and communities. For millions of Americans, it is the first big step on the ladder to financial security – to building assets that benefit families for many years to come.

Self-Help Housing isn’t the biggest home ownership program ... but it’s one of the best. It’s not easy. It requires a high level of commitment and motivation. It requires time and a lot of hard work. Not everyone is up to the challenge. But for those who are, it pays off.

The 21 families that are working together on this project are building more than houses. They're building a community, and it is a privilege for us to have this opportunity to help.

President Bush has spoken often about building an ownership society. To further that goal, since 2001 USDA Rural Development has invested over \$21 billion to help nearly a quarter of a million rural families become homeowners.

That has helped raise the homeownership rate in rural America to 76.1 percent, which significantly exceeds the national average. *[68.8 percent]* That's an all-time record.

But the big numbers don't really tell the story.

The real story is the pride that comes when you drive that last nail and move into a home you built yourself, crabgrass and all.

It's the smile on a child's face when she gets a room of her own.

It's the difference homeownership will make to each of these families 20 years down the road, when the equity you start building today transforms the options you and your children have tomorrow.

So this is an exciting day. Thank you for sharing it with us. We're glad to here. Thank you.